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**BACKSCATTER INTERROGATORS,
COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS AND
BACKSCATTER COMMUNICATION METHODS**

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1 **BACKSCATTER INTERROGATORS, COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS**
2 **AND BACKSCATTER COMMUNICATION METHODS**

3 TECHNICAL FIELD

4 The present invention relates to backscatter interrogators,
5 communication systems and backscatter communication methods.

6

7 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

8 Backscatter communication systems are known in the art. In a
9 backscatter system, one transponder, such as an interrogator, sends out
10 a command to a remote communications device. After the interrogator
11 transmits the command, and is expecting a response, the interrogator
12 switches to a CW mode (continuous wave mode). In the continuous
13 wave mode, the interrogator does not transmit any information. Instead,
14 the interrogator just transmits radiation at a certain frequency. In other
15 words, the signal transmitted by the interrogator is not modulated.
16 After a remote communications device receives a command from the
17 interrogator, the remote communications device processes the command.
18 The remote communications device of the backscatter system modulates
19 the continuous wave by switching between absorbing RF radiation and
20 reflecting RF radiation. For example, the remote communications device
21 alternately reflects or does not reflect the signal from the interrogator
22 to send its reply. Two halves of a dipole antenna can be either
23 shorted together or isolated from each other to modulate the continuous
24 wave.

1 One example of a backscatter system is described in commonly
2 assigned U.S. patent application 08/705,043, filed August 29, 1996, and
3 incorporated herein by reference. Another example of a backscatter
4 system is described in U.S. Patent No. 5,649,296 to MacLellan et al.
5 which is also incorporated herein by reference.

6 One application for backscatter communications is in wireless
7 electronic identification systems, such as those including radio frequency
8 identification devices. Of course, other applications for backscatter
9 communications exist as well. Most presently available radio frequency
10 identification devices utilize a magnetic coupling system. An identification
11 device is usually provided with a unique identification code in order to
12 distinguish between a number of different devices. Typically, the devices
13 are entirely passive (have no power supply), which results in a small and
14 portable package. However, such identification systems are only capable
15 of operation over a relatively short range, limited by the size of a
16 magnetic field used to supply power to the devices and to communicate
17 with the devices.

18 Another wireless electronic identification system utilizes a large,
19 board level, active transponder device affixed to an object to be monitored
20 which receives a signal from an interrogator. The device receives the
21 signal, then generates and transmits a responsive signal. The interrogation
22 signal and the responsive signal are typically radio-frequency (RF) signals
23 produced by an RF transmitter circuit. Because active devices have their
24 own power sources. The active devices do not need to be in close

1 proximity to an interrogator or reader to receive power via magnetic
2 coupling. Therefore, active transponder devices tend to be more suitable
3 for applications requiring tracking of objects that may not be in close
4 proximity to the interrogator, such as a railway car.

5 Spread spectrum modulation techniques are known in the art.
6 Utilization of spread spectrum modulation provides distinct advantages in
7 some communication applications. For example, some spread spectrum
8 modulation techniques enable desired signals to be distinguished from other
9 signals (e.g., radar, microwave ovens, etc.) operating at approximately the
10 same frequencies.

11 Federal Communication Commission (FCC) regulations require that
12 spread spectrum systems meet various requirements. For example, spread
13 spectrum systems operating in the 2.4 - 2.485 GHz band should comply
14 with FCC rule 15.247 which states, in relevant part, that the power
15 spectral density cannot be more than +8 dBm in any given 3 kHz band.
16 Further, the maximum power output is 1 Watt into a 6 dBi gain antenna.
17 The minimum 6 dB bandwidth for a direct sequence spread spectrum is
18 500 kHz. In addition, the energy within restricted bands of 0 - 2.390
19 GHz and 2.4835 - 2.5 GHz should be lower than 500 uV/m at three
20 meters. Communication systems operating within this specified band should
21 be designed with regard to these regulations.

22 Amplitude modulation (AM) communication techniques enable
23 communications with the use of relatively straightforward detectors.
24 Typically, such AM detectors can be efficiently implemented with the

utilization of relatively few components. However, drawbacks exist with the utilization of amplitude modulation techniques. For example, approximately half the total power of AM communications resides within the carrier. This limits the power which can be used for communicating data if AM modulation and spread spectrum techniques are utilized within the above specified frequency band.

Therefore, there exists a need to provide communication systems which comply with radio frequency regulations while also providing robust communications.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention includes backscatter interrogators, communication systems and backscatter communication methods.

One aspect of the invention provides a backscatter interrogator. The backscatter interrogator includes a data path configured to communicate a data signal and a signal generator configured to generate a carrier signal. The carrier signal comprises a microwave signal in preferred embodiments. The interrogator also provides a modulator coupled with the data path and the signal generator. The modulator is configured to spread the data signal to define a spread data signal and amplitude modulate the carrier signal using the spread data signal. The modulator is further configured to phase modulate the carrier signal to reduce the power within the carrier signal.

1 A second aspect of the present invention provides a backscatter
2 interrogator including a data path configured to communicate a data signal
3 and a signal generator configured to output a microwave carrier signal.
4 The backscatter interrogator further includes a modulator coupled with the
5 data path and the signal generator. One configuration of the modulator
6 is operable to spread the data signal and selectively invert the spread data
7 signal. The modulator is further configured to band limit the inverted
8 spread data signal and modulate the carrier signal using the band limited
9 data signal.

10 Another aspect of the present invention provides a backscatter
11 communication system including an interrogator and an electronic
12 communication device. The interrogator is configured to spread a data
13 signal. The interrogator is further configured to amplitude modulate a
14 carrier signal using the data signal and phase modulate the carrier signal
15 using the data signal. The interrogator is arranged to output the
16 amplitude modulated and phase modulated carrier signal. The electronic
17 communication device is configured to output a reply signal responsive to
18 reception of the amplitude modulated and phase modulated carrier signal.

19 Another aspect of the invention provides a backscatter communication
20 method including the steps of providing a data signal and providing a
21 carrier signal. This method also includes spreading the data signal,
22 amplitude modulating the carrier signal using the spread data signal, and
23 phase modulating the carrier signal. The amplitude modulated and phase
24 modulated carrier signal is thereafter communicated.

1 Another aspect of the invention provides a method of communication
2 in a backscatter system including an interrogator and a communication
3 device. The method includes providing a data signal, providing a carrier
4 signal and spreading the data signal. The method also includes modulating
5 the carrier signal using the spread data signal, communicating the
6 modulated carrier signal, and suppressing the carrier signal during the
7 communicating.

8 Yet another aspect of the invention provides a backscatter
9 communication method including the steps of providing a data signal and
10 a carrier signal. The invention also includes spreading the data signal,
11 selectively inverting the spread data signal, amplitude modulating the carrier
12 signal using the data signal, and communicating the modulated carrier
13 signal.

14

15 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

16 Preferred embodiments of the invention are described below with
17 reference to the following accompanying drawings.

18 Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating a communication system
19 embodying the invention.

20 Fig. 2 is a front view of an employee badge according to one
21 embodiment of the invention.

22 Fig. 3 is a front view of a radio frequency identification tag
23 according to another embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 4 is a circuit schematic of a transponder included in the system of Fig. 1.

Fig. 5 is a block diagram of an interrogator in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 6 is a circuit schematic of RF circuitry included in the interrogator of Fig. 5.

Fig. 7 is a circuit schematic of one embodiment of circuitry included in the RF configuration of Fig. 6.

Fig. 8 is an illustrative representation of a tri-level communication signal.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

This disclosure of the invention is submitted in furtherance of the constitutional purposes of the U.S. Patent Laws "to promote the progress of science and useful arts" (Article 1, Section 8).

Fig. 1 illustrates a wireless communications system 10 embodying the invention. Communications system 10 includes a first transponder including an interrogator 26 and a host computer 48 in communication with interrogator 26. Communications system 10 further includes an electronic communications device 12, such as the device disclosed in U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 08/705,043, filed August 29, 1996. In one embodiment, wireless communications device 12 comprises a wireless identification device such as the Microstamp (TM) integrated circuit available from Micron Communications, Inc., 3176 S. Denver Way, Boise,

1 Idaho 83705. Interrogator 26 communicates with the communications
2 device 12 via an electromagnetic link, such as via an RF link (e.g., at
3 microwave frequencies, in one embodiment). While other embodiments are
4 possible, in the illustrated embodiment the communications device 12
5 includes a transponder 16 having a receiver 30 and a transmitter 32
6 (Fig. 4). Communications device 12 further includes a power source 18
7 connected to transponder 16 to supply power to transponder 16.
8 Communications device 12 further includes at least one antenna connected
9 to transponder 16 for wireless transmission and reception. In the
10 illustrated embodiment, communications device 12 includes at least one
11 antenna 46 connected to transponder 16 for radio frequency transmission
12 by transponder 16, and at least one receive antenna 44 connected to
13 transponder 16 for radio frequency reception by transponder 16. In the
14 illustrated embodiment, the transmit antenna 46 is a dipole antenna, and
15 the receive antenna 44 is a loop antenna. In the illustrated embodiment,
16 the transponder 16 is in the form of an integrated circuit. However, in
17 alternative embodiments, all of the circuitry of transponder 16 is not
18 necessarily all included in a single integrated circuit.

19 Power source 18 is a thin film battery in the illustrated embodiment;
20 however, in alternative embodiments, other forms of power sources can be
21 employed. If the power source 18 is a battery, the battery can take any
22 suitable form. Preferably, the battery type will be selected depending on
23 weight, size, and life requirements for a particular application. In one
24 embodiment, the battery 18 is a thin profile button-type cell forming a

1 small, thin energy cell more commonly utilized in watches and small
2 electronic devices requiring a thin profile. A conventional button-type cell
3 has a pair of electrodes, an anode formed by one face and a cathode
4 formed by an opposite face. In an alternative embodiment, the
5 battery comprises a series connected pair of button type cells.

6 The communications device 12 can be included in any appropriate
7 housing or packaging.

8 Fig. 2 shows but one example of a housing in the form of a
9 card 11 comprising plastic or other suitable material. The plastic card 11
10 houses communications device 12 to define an employee identification
11 badge 13 including the communications device 12. In one embodiment,
12 the front face of badge 13 has visual identification features such as an
13 employee photograph or a fingerprint in addition to identifying text.

14 Fig. 3 illustrates but one alternative housing supporting the
15 device 12. More particularly, Fig. 3 illustrates a miniature housing 20
16 encasing the device 12 to define a tag which can be supported by an
17 object (e.g., hung from an object, affixed to an object, etc.).

18 Although two particular types of housings have been disclosed, the
19 communications device 12 can be included in any appropriate housing.
20 Communications device 12 is of a small size that lends itself to
21 applications employing small housings, such as cards, miniature tags, etc.
22 Larger housings can also be employed. The communications device 12,
23 housed in any appropriate housing, can be supported from or attached to
24 an object in any desired manner.

1 Interrogator unit 26 includes a plurality of antennas X1, R1, as well
2 as transmitting and receiving circuitry, similar to that implemented in the
3 device 16. The host computer 48 acts as a master in a master-slave
4 relationship with interrogator 26. The host computer 48 includes an
5 applications program for controlling the interrogator 26 and interpreting
6 responses, and a library of radio frequency identification device applications
7 or functions. Most of the functions communicate with interrogator 26.
8 These functions effect radio frequency communication between
9 interrogator 26 and communications device 12.

10 Communications system 10 includes a transmit antenna X1, and a
11 receive antenna R1 connected to interrogator 26. In operation, the
12 interrogator 26 transmits an interrogation signal or command 27 ("forward
13 link") via the antenna X1. The communications device 12 receives the
14 incoming interrogation signal via its antenna 44. Upon receiving the
15 signal 27, the communications device 12 responds by generating and
16 transmitting a responsive signal or reply signal 29 ("return link"). The
17 interrogator 26 is described in greater detail below.

18 In one embodiment, the responsive signal 29 is encoded with
19 information that uniquely identifies, or labels the particular device 12 that
20 is transmitting, so as to identify any object or person with which
21 communications device 12 is associated.

22 In the embodiment illustrated in Fig. 1, multiple communications
23 devices 12 can be employed; however, there is no communication between
24 multiple devices 12. Instead, the multiple communications devices 12

1 communicate with interrogator 26. Fig. 1 illustrates the communications
2 device 12 as being in the housing 20 of Fig. 3. The system would
3 operate in a similar manner if the device 12 is provided in a housing
4 such as the housing 10 of Fig. 2, or any other appropriate housing.
5 Multiple communications devices 12 can be used in the same field of an
6 interrogator 26 (i.e., within communications range of an interrogator 26).
7 Similarly, multiple interrogators 26 can be in proximity to one or more
8 of the devices 12.

9 The above described system 10 is advantageous over prior art
10 devices that utilize magnetic field effect systems because, with the
11 system 10, a greater range can be achieved, and more information can be
12 obtained (instead of just an identification number).

13 As a result, such a system 10 can be used, for example, to monitor
14 large warehouse inventories having many unique products needing individual
15 discrimination to determine the presence of particular items within a large
16 lot of tagged products.

17 Fig. 4 is a high level circuit schematic of the transponder 16
18 utilized in the devices of Figs. 1-3. In the embodiment shown in Fig. 4,
19 the transponder 16 is a monolithic integrated circuit. More particularly,
20 in the illustrated embodiment, the integrated circuit 16 comprises a single
21 die, having a size of 209 x 116 mils², including the receiver 30, the
22 transmitter 32, a micro controller or microprocessor 34, a wake up timer
23 and logic circuit 36, a clock recovery and data recovery circuit 38, and
24 a bias voltage and current generator 42.

1 In one embodiment, the communications devices 12 switch between
2 a "sleep" mode of operation, and higher power modes to conserve energy
3 and extend battery life during periods of time where no interrogation
4 signal 27 is received by devices 12, using the wake up timer and logic
5 circuitry 36.

6 In one embodiment, a spread spectrum processing circuit 40 is
7 included in transponder 16. In this embodiment, signals transmitted and
8 received by interrogator 26, and transmitted and received by
9 communications device 12 are modulated spread spectrum signals. Spread
10 spectrum modulation is described below.

11 Many modulation techniques minimize required transmission
12 bandwidth. However, the spread spectrum modulation technique employed
13 in the illustrated embodiment requires a transmission bandwidth that is up
14 to several orders of magnitude greater than the minimum required signal
15 bandwidth. Although spread spectrum modulation techniques are bandwidth
16 inefficient in single user applications, they are advantageous where there
17 are multiple users, as is the case with the instant radio frequency
18 identification system 24. The spread spectrum modulation technique of the
19 illustrated embodiment is advantageous because the interrogator signal can
20 be distinguished from other signals (e.g., radar, microwave ovens, etc.)
21 operating at the same frequency. The spread spectrum signals transmitted
22 by communications device 12 and by interrogator 26 are pseudo random
23 and have noise-like properties when compared with the digital command or
24 reply. The spreading waveform is controlled by a pseudo-noise or pseudo

1 random number (PN1) sequence or code. The PN code is a binary
2 sequence that appears random but can be reproduced in a predetermined
3 manner by the device 12. More particularly, incoming spread spectrum
4 signals are demodulated by communications device 12 or by interrogator 26
5 through cross correlation with a version of the pseudo random carrier that
6 is generated by communications device 12 itself or interrogator 26 itself,
7 respectively. Cross correlation with the correct PN sequence unspreads the
8 spread spectrum signal and restores the modulated message in the same
9 narrow band as the original data.

10 A pseudo-noise or pseudo random sequence (PN sequence) is a
11 binary sequence with an autocorrelation that resembles, over a period, the
12 autocorrelation of a random binary sequence. The autocorrelation of a
13 pseudo-noise sequence also roughly resembles the autocorrelation of
14 band-limited white noise. A pseudo-noise sequence has many characteristics
15 that are similar to those of random binary sequences. For example, a
16 pseudo-noise sequence has a nearly equal number of zeros and ones, very
17 low correlation between shifted versions of the sequence, and very low
18 cross correlation between any two sequences. A pseudo-noise sequence is
19 usually generated using sequential logic circuits. For example, a pseudo-
20 noise sequence can be generated using a feedback shift register.

21 A feedback shift register comprises consecutive stages of two state
22 memory devices, and feedback logic. Binary sequences are shifted through
23 the shift registers in response to clock pulses, and the output of the
24 various stages are logically combined and fed back as the input to the

1 first stage. The initial contents of the memory stages and the feedback
2 logic circuit determine the successive contents of the memory.

3 The illustrated embodiment employs direct sequence spread spectrum
4 modulation. A direct sequence spread spectrum (DSSS) system spreads the
5 baseband data by directly multiplying the baseband data pulses with a
6 pseudo-noise sequence that is produced by a pseudo-noise generator. A
7 single pulse or symbol of the PN waveform is called a "chip."
8 Synchronized data symbols, which may be information bits or binary
9 channel code symbols, are added in modulo-2 fashion to the chips before
10 being modulated. The receiver performs demodulation. For example, in
11 one embodiment the data is amplitude modulated. Assuming that code
12 synchronization has been achieved at the receiver, the received signal
13 passes through a wideband filter and is multiplied by a local replica of
14 the PN code sequence. This multiplication yields the unspread signal.

15 A pseudo-noise sequence is usually an odd number of chips long.
16 In the illustrated embodiment, one bit of data is represented by a thirty-
17 one chip sequence. A zero bit of data is represented by inverting the
18 pseudo-noise sequence.

19 Spread spectrum techniques are also disclosed in "Spread Spectrum
20 Systems," by R.C. Dixon, published by John Wiley and Sons, Inc.,
21 incorporated herein by reference.

22 In operation, the interrogator sends out a command that is spread
23 around a certain center frequency (e.g., 2.44 GHz). After the interrogator
24 transmits the command, and is expecting a response, the interrogator

1 switches to a CW mode (continuous wave mode). In the continuous wave
2 mode, the interrogator does not transmit any information. Instead, the
3 interrogator just transmits 2.44 GHz radiation. In other words, the signal
4 transmitted by the interrogator is not modulated. After the communications
5 device 12 receives the command from the interrogator, the communications
6 device 12 processes the command. If communications device 12 is in a
7 backscatter mode it alternately reflects or does not reflect the signal from
8 the interrogator to send its reply. For example, in the illustrated
9 embodiment, two halves of a dipole antenna are either shorted together or
10 isolated from each other to send a reply.

11 In one embodiment, the clock for the entire integrated circuit 16 is
12 extracted from the incoming message itself by clock recovery and data
13 recovery circuitry 38. This clock is recovered from the incoming
14 message, and used for timing for the micro controller 34 and all the other
15 clock circuitry on the chip, and also for deriving the transmitter carrier
16 or the subcarrier, depending on whether the transmitter is operating in
17 active mode or backscatter mode.

18 In addition to recovering a clock, the clock recovery and data
19 recovery circuit 38 also performs data recovery on valid incoming signals.
20 The valid spread spectrum incoming signal is passed through the spread
21 spectrum processing circuit 40, and the spread spectrum processing
22 circuit 40 extracts the actual ones and zeros of data from the incoming
23 signal. More particularly, the spread spectrum processing circuit 40 takes
24 the chips from the spread spectrum signal, and reduces each thirty-one

1 chip section down to a bit of one or zero, which is passed to the micro
2 controller 34.

3 Micro controller 34 includes a serial processor, or I/O facility that
4 receives the bits from the spread spectrum processing circuit 40. The
5 micro controller 34 performs further error correction. More particularly,
6 a modified hamming code is employed, where each eight bits of data is
7 accompanied by five check bits used by the micro controller 34 for error
8 correction. Micro controller 34 further includes a memory, and after
9 performing the data correction, micro controller 34 stores bytes of the data
10 bits in memory. These bytes contain a command sent by the
11 interrogator 26. The micro controller 34 responds to the command.

12 For example, the interrogator 26 may send a command requesting
13 that any communications device 12 in the field respond with the device's
14 identification number. Status information is also returned to
15 interrogator 26 from communications device 12 when communications
16 device 12 responds.

17 The transmitted replies have a format similar to the format of
18 incoming messages. More particularly, a reply starts with a preamble
19 (e.g., all zeros in active mode, or alternating double zeros and double
20 ones in backscatter mode), followed by a Barker or start code, followed
21 by actual data.

22 The incoming message and outgoing reply preferably also include a
23 check sum or redundancy code so that integrated circuit 16 or
24 interrogator 12 can confirm receipt of the entire message or reply.

1 Interrogator 26 provides a communication link between a host
2 computer and transponder 16. Interrogator 26 connects to the host
3 computer 48 via an IEEE-1284 enhanced parallel port (EPP). The
4 interrogator communicates with transponder 16 via the RF antennas X1
5 and R1.

6 A Maximal Length Pseudo Noise (PN) Sequence is used in the
7 Direct Sequence Spread Spectrum (DSSS) communications scheme in the
8 forward link. In one embodiment, the sequence is generated by a linear
9 feedback shift register. This produces a repeating multiple "chip"
10 sequence.

11 A zero bit is transmitted as one inverted full cycle of the PN
12 sequence. A one bit is transmitted as one full non-inverted cycle of the
13 PN sequence.

14 After sending a command, the interrogator sends a continuous
15 unmodulated RF signal with an approximate frequency of 2.44175 GHz.
16 Return link data is Differential Phase Shift Key (DPSK) modulated onto
17 a square wave subcarrier with a frequency of approximately 600 kHz
18 (e.g., 596.1 kHz in one embodiment). A data 0 corresponds to one phase
19 and data 1 corresponds to another, shifted 180 degrees from the first
20 phase. The subcarrier is used to modulate antenna impedance of
21 transponder 16. For a simple dipole, a switch between the two halves
22 of the dipole antenna is opened and closed. When the switch is closed,
23 the antenna becomes the electrical equivalent of a single half-wavelength
24 antenna that reflects a portion of the power being transmitted by the

1 interrogator. When the switch is open, the antenna becomes the electrical
2 equivalent of two quarter-wavelength antennas that reflect very little of the
3 power transmitted by the interrogator. In one embodiment, the dipole
4 antenna is a printed microstrip half wavelength dipole antenna.

5 Referring to Fig. 5, one embodiment of interrogator 26 is illustrated.
6 The depicted interrogator 26 includes enhanced parallel port (EPP)
7 circuitry 50, DPSK (differential phase shift keyed) circuitry 52, and RF
8 (radio frequency) circuitry 54, as well as a power supply (not shown) and
9 a housing or chassis (not shown). In the illustrated embodiment, the
10 enhanced parallel port circuitry 50, the DPSK circuitry 52, and the RF
11 circuitry 54 respectively define circuit card assemblies (CCAs).

12 The interrogator uses an IEEE-1284 compatible port in EPP mode
13 to communicate with host computer 48. The EPP circuitry 50 provides
14 digital logic required to coordinate sending and receiving a message with
15 transponder 16. The EPP circuitry 50 buffers data to transmit from host
16 computer 48, converts the data to serial data, and encodes it. The EPP
17 circuitry 50 then waits for data from the transponder 16, converts it to
18 parallel, and transfers it to host computer 48. In one embodiment,
19 messages include up to 64 bytes of data.

20 The EPP mode interface provides an asynchronous, interlocked, byte
21 wide, bi-directional channel controlled by a host device. The EPP mode
22 allows the host computer to transfer, at high speed, a data byte to/from
23 the interrogator within a single host computer CPU I/O cycle (typically 0.5
24 microseconds per byte).

1 RF circuitry 54 interfaces with the transmit and receive
2 antennas X1, R1. Exemplary transmit operations of RF circuitry 54 are
3 described with reference to Figs. 6-8. RF circuitry 54 modulates the data
4 for transmission to transponder 16, provides a continuous wave (CW)
5 carrier for backscatter communications with transponder 16 (if backscatter
6 communications are employed), and receives and downconverts the signal
7 received from transponder 16 (which comprises a backscatter signal in one
8 embodiment).

9 Referring to Fig. 6, RF circuitry 54 includes a data path 73, signal
10 generator 75, amplifier 76 and modulator 77. An exemplary signal
11 generator comprises a frequency synthesizer configured to tune the RF
12 continuous wave carrier. In the described embodiment, signal generator 75
13 is configured to generate a microwave carrier signal (e.g.,
14 approximately 2.44 GHz).

15 RF circuitry 54 defines a transmitter, and is configured to receive
16 data from EPP circuitry 50. Modulator 77 is coupled with data path 73
17 and signal generator 75. Data path 73 comprises an interconnection such
18 as a wire configured to communicate a data signal to modulator 77.
19 Modulator 77 receives the data from EPP circuitry 50 and amplitude
20 modulates the data onto a carrier in the described embodiment. More
21 particularly, modulator 77 turns the RF on and off (ON OFF KEY).

22 According to one embodiment, modulator 77 is configured to spread
23 the data signal to provide spread spectrum communications including a
24 spread data signal. Modulator 77 is further configured to amplitude

1 modulate the carrier signal using the spread data signal. In a preferred
2 embodiment, modulator 77 is configured to phase modulate the carrier
3 signal. Phase modulation is utilized to provide suppression of power
4 within the carrier signal in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the
5 invention. Following such amplitude and phase modulation, interrogator 26
6 is preferably configured to communicate the carrier signal.

7 Modulator 77 can be configured to spread the data signal using the
8 PN1 pseudo-noise sequence. The first pseudo-noise sequence code (PN1)
9 is encoded with data received by communications path 73. In a preferred
10 embodiment, modulator 77 is thereafter configured to invert the spread data
11 signal. Phase modulation of the carrier signal is responsive to selected
12 inverting of the spread data signal. Encoding the pseudo-noise sequence
13 with the data signal forms a plurality of chips. The chips individually
14 correspond to one of two values, such as logical high (1) or logical
15 low (0). Modulator 77 is configured in a preferred embodiment to
16 selectively invert the chips of the spread signal to implement phase
17 modulation.

18 In one embodiment, modulator 77 is configured to randomly invert
19 the spread data signal. Modulator 77 is operable in the preferred
20 embodiment to invert the spread data signal using a second pseudo-noise
21 sequence (PN2). The second pseudo-noise sequence code (PN2) is utilized
22 to modulate the phase of the RF carrier in the described embodiment.
23 The second pseudo-noise sequence (PN2) utilized to provide random
24 inversion of the spread data signal comprises a 1,023 bit sequence in one

1 embodiment. Such can be implemented using logic circuitry and shift
2 registers configured in a feedback arrangement in one embodiment.

3 Randomly changing the phase of the RF carrier signal implements
4 phase modulation and provides the desired effect of spreading the carrier
5 energy over a wider band width. Thus, the communication power can be
6 increased while decreasing the amount of power present in the carrier.

7 The random code or pseudo-noise sequence (PN2) utilized to
8 implement selected inversion of the spread data signal is preferably band
9 limited to avoid excessive spectral spreading. The carrier signal can be
10 modulated using the band limited data signal.

11 Modulator 77 can be arranged to implement the inversion operations
12 responsive to the spread data signal being a predetermined value. For
13 example, modulator 77 can be configured to invert one or more chips of
14 the spread data signal responsive to the spread data signal being a logical
15 low value (e.g., zero Volts). The inverting is preferably coordinated or
16 synchronized with the spread data signal.

17 In particular, modulator 77 is preferably configured such that the
18 second pseudo-noise sequence (PN2) changes state, and implements inversion
19 of the spread data signal, at predetermined places corresponding to the
20 spread data signal. It is preferred to restrict state changes of the PN2
21 pseudo-noise sequence to periods of time wherein the carrier signal is off
22 during amplitude modulation. For example, during the presence of
23 multiple adjacent zeros within the spread data signal, sufficient time
24 typically exists for the second pseudo-noise sequence to complete a state

1 change while the carrier signal is turned off. Such is preferred to reduce
2 inducing of an amplitude variation within the output communicated signal
3 which may cause error within the associated remote communication device
4 inasmuch as the second pseudo-noise sequence pulses have a limited rise
5 and fall time.

6 It is desired to reduce communicated energy present in restricted
7 frequency bands in many applications. Modulator 77 is configured in one
8 embodiment to band limit or filter signals within RF circuitry 54. A
9 preferred configuration is to filter baseband signals within modulator 77
10 before conversion to RF frequencies. Modulator 77 includes a filter
11 configured to band limit the spread data signal in the described
12 embodiment.

13 Referring to Fig. 7, an exemplary modulator 77 is illustrated. The
14 depicted modulator 77 includes logic circuitry 65, summing amplifier 64,
15 low pass filter 66, attenuator 68, and mixer 69. Modulator 77 is coupled
16 with EPP circuitry 50, code generator 60, code generator 61, signal
17 generator 75, and power amplifier 76.

18 The depicted logic circuitry 65 comprises an exclusive NOR
19 device 62 and an exclusive OR device 63. Exclusive NOR device 62 is
20 coupled with EPP circuitry 50 via data path 73 and code generator 60.
21 Device 62 is configured to encode the pseudo-noise sequence (PN1) from
22 code generator 60 with data received via path 73, and output a spread
23 data signal. The spread data signal is applied to exclusive OR device 63
24 as well as code generator 61.

1 Code generator 61 is configured to change state according to second
2 pseudo-noise sequence (PN2) and responsive to the spread data signal being
3 a predetermined value. The PN2 output of code generator 61 is applied
4 to exclusive OR device 63 and summing amplifier 64. In the described
5 embodiment, code generator 61 is configured to change the state of the
6 outputted signal according to pseudo-noise sequence (PN2) and responsive
7 to the spread data being a logic low value as received from exclusive
8 NOR device 62. The pseudo-noise sequence (PN2) outputted from code
9 generator 61 and applied to exclusive OR device 63 randomly inverts the
10 spread data signal.

11 The output of exclusive OR device 63 is also applied to summing
12 amplifier 64. Summing amplifier 64 is configured to combine the pseudo-
13 random noise sequences PN1, PN2. Summing amplifier 64 is further
14 configured to output a tri-level or tri-state signal to implement the
15 amplitude modulation and phase modulation of the carrier signal using
16 mixer 69. The carrier signal is modulated using the tri-level signal
17 corresponding to the inverted data signal in the described embodiment.
18 Combination of the spread data signal and the PN2 pseudo-noise sequence
19 provided by code generator 61 is preferred to reduce the amount of
20 hardware utilized within modulator 77. Summing amplifier 64 preferably
21 includes an offset adjustment 67 utilized to balance the amplitude outputted
22 from mixer 69 to provide maximum carrier suppression in the preferred
23 embodiment.

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1 In the depicted embodiment, the tri-level or state output of summing
2 amplifier 64 is applied to low pass filter 66, attenuator 68 and mixer 69.
3 Low pass filter 66 is configured in the described embodiment to reduce
4 spreading of energy into restricted bands adjacent the desired band for
5 communication. In one embodiment, low pass filter 66 comprises a seven
6 pole filter having a cutoff frequency of 20 MHz. In particular, filter 66
7 preferably limits the rise and fall time of the spread data signal
8 represented within the tri-level signal as described below.

9 Attenuator 68 is configured to adjust the amplitude of the outputted
10 signal of low pass filter 66. Discrete components 78 are provided
11 intermediate attenuator 68 and mixer 69. The illustrated discrete
12 components 78 include a series capacitor and a resistor coupled to ground.
13 Discrete components 78 are operable to block DC components within the
14 output of attenuator 68.

15 The tri-level signal can comprise three states in the described
16 embodiment. A logical high value can be represented by either a positive
17 voltage or negative voltage within the tri-level signal. Communication
18 device 12 is configured to interpret both positive and negative voltages as
19 a logical high value in the described embodiment. A logical low value
20 is preferably approximately zero Volts within the described tri-level signal.

21 Mixer 69 is configured to invert the phase of the carrier signal
22 responsive to the reception of a negative value within the tri-level signal
23 emitted from summing amplifier 64. A positive voltage within the tri-level
24 signal results in no change of the phase of the carrier signal. Mixer 69

1 turns the RF carrier signal off responsive to the tri-level signal being zero
2 Volts.

3 The output of mixer 69 is applied to amplifier 76 in the described
4 embodiment. The depicted amplifier 76 comprises a power amplifier
5 coupled to modulator 77 and configured to amplify the signal.
6 Amplifier 76 is operable responsive to control from EPP circuitry 50 in
7 the illustrated embodiment.

8 Referring to Fig. 8, operation of modulator 77 is illustrated. Plural
9 signals 90-96 are shown in Fig. 8. Signal 90 represents the data output
10 of EPP circuitry 50. Signal 91 corresponds to the first pseudo-noise
11 sequence (PN1) signal outputted from code generator 60. Signal 92
12 represents the output of exclusive NOR device 62. Signal 93 corresponds
13 to the second pseudo-noise sequence (PN2) signal outputted from code
14 generator 61. Signal 94 represents the output of exclusive OR device 63.
15 Signal 95 represents the output of summing amplifier 64 and signal 96
16 represents the output of low pass filter 66.

17 Low pass filter 66 is preferably configured to reduce the presence
18 of harmonic information within the tri-level signal. Filter 66 can be
19 configured to pass fundamental frequency information and any other
20 harmonic information necessary for proper operation of remote
21 communication device 12.

22 For example, low pass filter 66 can be configured to pass
23 fundamental frequency and third harmonic information in one application
24 (e.g., the remote communication device is sensitive to slow rising and

1 falling edges). It is preferred to adjust filter 66 to provide optimal
2 bandwidth efficiency while effectively communicating data to the associated
3 remote electronic communication device 12.

4 During continuous wave (CW) transmissions for the backscatter mode,
5 modulator 77 is configured to apply the carrier signal to transmit
6 antenna X1. Transponder 16 is operable to backscatter the signal with a
7 DPSK modulated sub carrier. Following receipt of the command
8 communication signal from interrogator 26, communication device 12 can
9 be configured to output a reply signal. In backscatter configurations,
10 device 12 is operable to modulate the CW emission from interrogator 26.
11 The backscattered reply signal is received via receive antenna R1 of
12 interrogator 26.

13 Although not shown in Figs. 6-8, RF circuitry 54 can include a
14 quadrature downconverter configured to coherently downconvert the received
15 reply signal. RF circuitry 54 can also include automatic gain controls
16 (AGCs) coupled to the quadrature downconverter and configured to set the
17 amplitude of signals I and Q. The I and Q signals, which contain the
18 DPSK modulated sub-carrier, are passed on to DPSK circuitry 52 for
19 demodulation.

20 In compliance with the statute, the invention has been described in
21 language more or less specific as to structural and methodical features.
22 It is to be understood, however, that the invention is not limited to the
23 specific features shown and described, since the means herein disclosed
24 comprise preferred forms of putting the invention into effect. The

1 invention is, therefore, claimed in any of its forms or modifications within
2 the proper scope of the appended claims appropriately interpreted in
3 accordance with the doctrine of equivalents.

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